

7-1-2010

## The Ethics of Educational Leadership

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### Recommended Citation

Fowler, Denver J. (2010) "The Ethics of Educational Leadership," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*: Vol. 8: Iss. 3, Article 45.

DOI: 10.58809/ISRA2056

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol8/iss3/45>

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# Academic Leadership Journal

Rebore, Ronald W. (2000) *The Ethics of Educational Leadership*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Pp. xiv + 290 \$87.95  
ISBN 10: 0-1378-7920-2

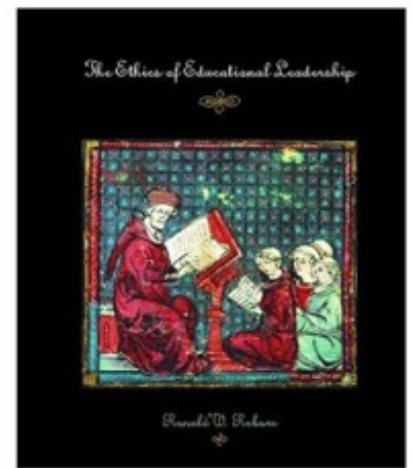
ISBN 13: 978-0-137-87920-5

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April 22, 2010

"No issue has captured the interest and imagination of the American public more than the subject of ethics, particularly in relation to leadership in the public sector" (Rebore, 2000, p.v). One of the most universal questions in educational leadership is "What is the relationship of ethics as it relates to educational leadership?" The answer can be very complex. Many authors who have written on the subject of ethics in educational leadership have tried to answer this question. All major branches of ethics must be considered when attempting to answer this question. These branches include meta-ethics, normative ethics, applied ethics, moral psychology, and descriptive ethics and how each relates to the moral dimension of leadership. Research suggests that ethical leadership remains largely unexplored offering researchers opportunities for new discoveries and leaders opportunities to improve their effectiveness. In treating the subject of ethics as it relates to educational leadership, the material and argumentation Rebore uses in *The Ethics of Educational Leadership* (2000) in this text are organized in such a way that they support Standard Five of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders and help answer this very question. Standard Five of the ISLLC states that a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (ethical leadership).

*The Ethics of Educational Leadership* provides a basis for the development of many ethical principles while also focusing on the work of important philosophers, their methodology, and their method of analysis. Within the text, two philosophers from the classical period are presented as well as six from the modern period (the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) and fifteen from the contemporary period. According to the author, these philosophers were chosen because of their ideas and how they are relevant to the American ethos as well as to the practice of educational leadership.



The text focuses on all aspects of education leadership including ethics in administration, fundamental principles endemic to being an ethical person who is also an educational leader, the ethical practice of educational leadership, practice of central-office and school-building administration, equity and educational leadership, social justice in educational leadership, and how public discourse can contribute to the development of educational administration policies.

Part 1 of this text concentrates on Standard Five of Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders (see <http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/isllcstd.pdf>). These standards are the product of the Council of Chief State School Officers (see <http://www.ccsso.org>). Rebores describes that the standards were drafted by professionals from twenty-four state education agencies and representatives from professional associations. It should also be noted that the standards are compatible with the new National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) curriculum guidelines for school administration. (<http://www.ncate.org/>) This is the model being used by many states to assess candidates seeking licensure as school administrators. Rebores addresses various aspects of all the dimensions set forth by the ISLLC except for the 'Knowledge' section in which he does not address the philosophy and history of education sections. He notes this in his book so that the reader knows it was deliberately excluded from the text.

Also in Chapter 1, the author addresses the classical beginnings of ethical consideration that are found in Plato's account of Socrates' trial. Socrates was accused of disturbing the social order because he went about Athens asking citizens their opinions concerning the ultimate meaning of human existence. At his trial he accepted the death penalty (by drinking hemlock) rather than give up his search for truth. Socrates features prominently in many texts on ethics in educational leadership. Strike (2007) states that "Socrates lived in a society that, like ours, was increasingly multicultural, increasingly aware that human beings answer life's persistent questions in quite different ways, and increasingly insecure about its own commitments" (p. 29). Beckner (2004) states that "Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle must be given credit for long ago developing most of what is called the ethics of aspiration and which we have discussed under the label" (p. 144). The questions that Socrates asked were not merely academic questions, but rather were among the fundamental questions of human life: What is justice? What is love? What is virtue? What is piety? What is good? What is knowledge? Can virtue be taught? and How shall we live? All questions directly related to the ethics and morality of human beings.

Chapter one also considers meta-ethics and normative ethics—both how they differ and how they are connected. Whereas normative ethics is the study of human conduct, meta-ethics is the study of the conditions that affect normative ethics: "Such controversies as the relationship between free will and determinism, between authority and intuition, between deductive and inductive reasoning, and between skepticism and cognitivism are subject matter of meta-ethics" (p. 6-7). Similarly defined, meta-ethics can be seen in other educational leadership texts. Weldon Beckner (2004) describes meta-values similarly to the way Rebores describes meta-ethics. Beckner states that "meta-values are those concepts of the desirable so vested and entrenched that it seems to be beyond dispute or contention. The principal organizational meta-values are maintenance, growth, effectiveness, and efficiency. They are by definition "good". The question is always whether they are "right"" (p. 99). It shows that the systems of ethics are all interconnected. Since the ultimate goal of ethics is to somehow establish standards of conduct, deep consideration should be implemented since conduct implies that humans can choose one course of action or an alternative. Rebores states "There are three important reasons for educational leaders to incorporate ethical analysis as an ongoing way of thinking: ethics explores

important issues that act as a framework for decision making based on core values; ethics utilizes a disciplined way of thinking; and ethics provides a unique kind of response to leadership issues” (p. 15).

Chapter 2 is dedicated to developing a personal approach to ethics. The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section, *The Dynamics of Ethics*, focuses on both concepts and ideas that would be helpful to any educational leader or those people planning a career in educational leadership. This section is intended to aid in helping educational leaders everywhere in developing their own personal ethical system. The second section, *The Search for Meaning in Life*, attempts to establish a general framework within educational leaders or those preparing to become educational leaders where they can reflect on in their own search for meaning given the ideas and concepts presented in section one of this chapter. The focus of this chapter is to help educational leaders in developing their own ethical approach to being an educational leader. Section one sets forth a foundational approach to ethical norms, the evolution of ethical norms, social ethics, and a focus on various methods for making ethical decisions. Section two articulates a framework within which educational leaders and those becoming educational leaders can reflect on the meaning of their professional lives. The discussion throughout this section focuses on three topics: the search of meaning, human suffering, and liberation from suffering. Appropriately named, this section focuses on meaning of life, the struggle to find meaning, and how meaning is the primary motivator in life for everyone and also how that meaning is unique to each person. “The search to find meaning is fundamentally related to each person’s profession or occupation” (p. 34). The text suggests that educational leaders, along with teachers, can find meaning through benefactors of the accomplishments produced by students in school and throughout their lives. I believe the author is trying to convey that educational leaders and teachers should know that their professional occupation and life, along with the human potentiality of their students, is the meaning they so often seek in order to give their work validity. In regards to happiness and finding the meaning of life Dalai Lama (1999) states, “We are sustained in this great quest for happiness, it seems to me, by hope. We know, even if we do not admit it, that there can be no guarantee of a better, happier life than the one we are leading today” (p. 4). This chapter offers school leaders that hope by which it is the human potentiality of their students that they find meaning and give their work validity.

The last chapter of Part 1, Chapter 3, focuses on the ethics of power and duty in educational leadership. The author appropriately names this chapter, as its focus is strictly on power and duty in educational leadership. This chapter considers the practice of educational administration as it relates to two variables, both of which have a profound effect on the quality of leadership. The first is the use of power within schools and school districts. The second is duty. In section one of the chapter, the focus is on the power that exists in any professional relationships where there is a supervisor-employee dimension. Since school leaders and administrators often have the authority to employ, encourage, foster, censure, discipline, and terminate the employment of others, leaders and administrators are people that hold a position of power. The author states, “the most effective way to fulfill this responsibility is to promote the growth and development of employees, which will enable them to improve their performance and thus will enrich the quality of the service they provide” (p. 55). Using the ten characteristics of organizations that can serve as criteria on how to assess the quality of the cultural climate within schools and school districts, the chapter clearly identifies does a great job of identifying factors that can help both current and future school leaders assess the quality of the cultural climate within their schools. Since exercising power and fostering a positive school culture both fall under the domain of educational leadership, this part of the chapter is particularly important to both current and

future school leaders on dealing with the purpose of, and method used, in exercising that power. Many other notable authors in educational leadership agree with the ideas represented in this text. Beckner (2004) states “The gaining and holding of power are argued to be the ultimate goals of social and political life, so as to promote order and prosperity. One may violate an agreement or break a promise if it is in one’s best interests to do so, because humanity is at least somewhat corrupt and others will do the same” (p. 14-15). Strike (2007) states that “If you accept the responsibility to create a school community in which people live well together while students learn how to live well, you must find ways to honor these mandates and benchmarks while serving a praiseworthy conception of education and creating a professional, democratic, and deliberative culture in your school” (p. 148).

In *Ethics for the New Millennium*, the Dalai Lama (1999) writes, with regard to the use of discipline in decision-making, that “conducting ourselves ethically consists in more than merely obeying laws and concepts” (p. 82). I believe that all four authors are conveying that fostering a positive school culture is the mirror image of a school leader that practices good moral ethics when using their power. The text in part 1 of chapter 3 focuses on six types of power. These are Inspirational, Charismatic, Expert, Persuasive, Knowledge, and Coercive. The author does an excellent job of defining each type of power while also acknowledging the importance of each, its role, and its significance to becoming an effective school leader. The second variable presented in this chapter is duty and how duty influences leadership at the individual rather than the organizational level. This section within chapter 3 focuses on the balance between the organizational and the personal dimensions of educational leadership. The author maintains that both perspectives are necessary. The chapter focuses on the effective educational leader and how they will come to recognize that such perspectives are complementary and not mutually exclusive. The section on duty begins with a treatment of the charisma of leadership. The section on duty draws on work by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung,. His insight is used to help explicate this treatment of charisma. The chapter iterates that leadership is exercised through the performance of duties. The author states that “understanding the nuances of duty is not always easy, however, and there are many different opinions as to how duty is operationalized” (p. 56). This part of the text focuses on the importance of understanding and knowing one’s duty in relation to not only being a school leader, but also its significance in relation to self, family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, acquaintances, community, state, or nation. In this chapter Rebores creates what amounts to a manual for school practitioners to become better school leaders, grow and develop in their profession, as well as become better people.

Part 2 focuses on the ethical practice of educational leadership. Chapter 4 examines the ethics of district-level leadership under the following three aspects: contractarianism, utilitarianism, and professionalism. In the contractarianism section of the chapter the text focuses on creating both vision and goals for a school district through such things as community cultural assessment, school-reform expectations, the debureaucratization of school districts, empowerment, and the privatization movements. In the section on utilitarianism the text focuses on ethics in consideration of assessment and reporting of student achievement, curriculum development, human-resource leadership, fiscal accountability, and stress in the superintendency. The last section on professionalism in school-district leadership reviews and analyzes the ethical statements of the American Association of School Administrators, the Association of School Business Officials International, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the National School Boards Association, all important information for current or future school leaders. The author uses three philosophers to support the three key ideas presented in this chapter. The three philosophers Rebores uses are Jean-Jacques Rousseau,

most notable for his political philosophy which influenced the French Revolution, Jean-Francois Lyotard, well-known for his articulation of postmodernism, and John Stuart Mill, the English philosopher, political theorist, and political economist. [1] Weldon Beckner (2004) states that Mill, along with others, “developed the notion that mankind is governed by two things, pleasure and pain” (p. 16) in regards to utility. Although there is no selected reading for Lyotard, Rebore uses Lyotard’s commentary on Rousseau’s concept of the social contract theory through a report given in 1979 to the education community in Quebec, Canada. The text shines light on Lyotard’s view that the current milieu is producing discontinuity, plurality, and logically unjustified conclusions. What this means is that Lyotard feels that society has lessened the requirement on decision making by those in authority. Furthermore he contends that the extensive use of technology in decision-making and the lack of communication among people is a result of modern society.

Other philosophers and their approaches are also noted in this chapter including the work of Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and their contributions to the analytical movement. It briefly focuses on the movement and how it split into two schools: the formalists, represented by Russell, and the linguists, represented by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Where the formalist utilized the scientific method to problems of philosophy, the linguistic branch believed that these problems could be solved through careful examination of language. John Locke is also mentioned. Locke believed that society was established by a social contract and accepted this as historical fact. In Locke’s works “the notion that individual rights have priority over the common good is prevalent” (p. 128). John Locke contended that people are entitled to equal respect. Kenneth Strike (2007) describes Locke’s work as “the most formative influence on the United States view of government” (p. 46). Further iterating Locke’s ideals that no one is born a natural slave, serf, or servant, Weldon Beckner (2004) notes in his book “John Locke also gave prime attention to both our senses and to reason, proposing that we are born with a “blank slate” from a mind” (p. 13). All these approaches were properly noted within the chapter 4. The excerpt helps the reader understand the importance of the analytical movement and the author ties this in to the philosophical approaches and other issues in this chapter. This implies that the contractarian approach is embedded in the writings of many philosophers throughout history, each with a slightly different outlook on the notion of social contract, but all equally important to current and future school leaders.

Chapter 5 is entitled “Ethical Considerations in School-Building Leadership.” The author summarizes his purpose for this chapter thus: to “center on creating a positive school culture and participative leadership” (p. 143). The chapter focuses on Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher most noted for his book Leviathan and his perspectives on social contract theory. Rebore focuses on Hobbes’s laws and defines each for the reader. Other philosophers mentioned in the chapter are Jeremy Bentham and John Dewey: Bentham for his contribution to utilitarianism as it relates to the ethical practice of educational leadership and Dewey for his approach to dealing with ethical issues through pragmatism. Lastly the chapter focuses on empowerment, the empowerment of students, the empowerment of teachers, and how each is affected by school culture. Rebore notes “true student empowerment will be ineffective unless empowerment opportunities are extended to students with disabilities and to students who do not fit the mainstream model” (p. 166). What the chapter is trying to convey is that there are many different approaches to ethical issues and many ways the idea of teacher and student empowerment can be implemented by school leaders. School culture is again addressed and there are many helpful hints as to effective ways to help students recognize that they are valued members of the school community. Concurrent with school culture is the focus on participation as the necessity for

developing problem-solving and leadership skills in students. This chapter clearly describes important elements that are needed in order for a school leader to create a school culture that supports student empowerment.

Chapter 6 focuses on equity and educational leadership, particularly as it relates to gender. The chapter does contend that these gender equity issues are improving, albeit slowly. But the main focus of the chapter is how the oppression of women has had economic, legal, political, psychological, and social ramifications for both men and women. The chapter's main focus is on the writings of four women who have written extensively about gender issues. These women are Edith Stein, Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Bordo, and Sandra Harding. Each of these women has had a significant influence on the gender-equity movement in a positive way. In this chapter the selected readings (6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4) again prove to be strong contributions to this book by the author. The general theme of this chapter is that the contributions these four individuals have made to the pursuit of gender equity have and will lead to more equality in employment and break down the walls of inequity as it relates to educational leadership. Rebore iterates that the "leaders of the feminist movement have recognized that the liberation of women in all areas of life has always hinged on their economic security" (p. 213).

In this chapter many laws dealing directly with such equity issues are considered. In 1991, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act and the federal agency charged with enforcing these laws, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), issued a directive in 1980 declaring that sexual harassment is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Both actions from Congress and the EEOC have had a tremendous effect on the manner in which some women are treated within the workplace. Rebore also lists several other sources of discrimination in our contemporary society including age, disability, race, and ethnicity. He contends that these are "more from greed and the quest for political influence than from ontological basis" (p. 185). Although the chapter's main purpose may be to focus on the fact that women are still underrepresented in positions of educational leadership, particularly in the superintendency. Rebore also does an excellent job of reporting the contributions these four women have contributed to the study of ethics. By including the excerpts of these women's work in the selected readings (6.1-6.4), Rebore clearly made a commitment to bring these problems to surface since they still effect men and women in today's society.

In the last chapter of Part 2, appropriately titled Pluralism, Justice, Discourse Ethics, and Educational Leadership, the focus is on the influx of immigrants into the United States and the effect it is having on both ethnic composition and the religious orientation of the United States. The chapter reminds us that our nation is made up of many different religions including Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and Confucian. Rebore states, "The United States is the most religiously diverse country on earth" (p. 219). In this chapter the text iterates to the reader the complications involving human rights issues with regard to religious and ethnic pluralism of the population. The ethnicity in the United States naturally sets forth a concern for social justice. These religious and ethnic pluralisms further complicate the human right issues revolving around discrimination based on age, disability, gender, illness, and lifestyle. This chapter brings to the surface the profession of educational leadership and how the greatest current issue is how principles, superintendents, school leaders, and other administrators will be able to practice effective leadership among such a tremendous diversity range. More now than ever, school leaders will be responsible for hiring staff of diverse religious backgrounds and ethnic groups. Strike (2007) in regards to Justice and hiring decisions stated "school leaders face other issues of justice and fairness in addition to equality of educational opportunity" (p. 76). Weldon Beckner (2004) in referring



to character in educational leadership states “Justice includes fairness, honesty, and promise keeping” (p. 78). Rebores most effectively states that “Developing a working knowledge and understanding of pluralism, justice, and discourse ethics will lead to more effective resolution of value-laden conflicts” (p. 261). Perhaps his holiness the Dalai Lama (1999) says it best when he states that “Through developing an attitude of responsibility toward others, we can begin to create a kinder, more compassionate world we all dream of” (p. 173). I believe that chapter 7 is suggesting that our aim should be to extend our compassion toward all others even in the political arena of a practicing school leader and that recourse to philosophical notions of humanity can serve as excellent guides in striving for justice in both schools and school districts while also preparing students to live in an increasingly diverse society. It is clearly evident here that “the degree to which a society, its institutions, its political culture, its traditions, and its everyday practices permit a noncoercive and nonauthoritarian form of ethical living is the hallmark of rational morality, which is derived from discourse” (p. 261).

This text should be of great interest to three groups of people: professors of educational leadership, practicing school administrators, and members of the general public who have an interest in how ethics relates to educational leadership. Although I did not note the relevance of the case studies used throughout the book and in each chapter, I believe they are of great significance for both a college professor using this book to teach a course in the ethics of educational leadership and current and future administrators and school leaders. The discussion questions and statements at the end of each chapter are also helpful to readers and I believe would be most beneficial to a college professor teaching courses within ethics in educational leadership if they were to use this text for their course. This text unquestionably belongs in a course that focuses on ethics in educational leadership. There is also an Appendix: Ethical Orientation Self-Test in order to help provide readers with an assessment of his or her understanding of ethical principles as they relate to his or her professional actions. This can be very helpful in determining whether one truly understands ethical principles as they relate to your professional actions and leadership activities. Furthermore the text includes several excerpts from the writings of many important philosophers and also from documents that set forth many principles that will have an impact on ethical conduct in educational leadership. I also thought that the Epilogue, which the author states is the “fourth part of this book” (p. vi), leaves the reader with some final thoughts about ethics in general.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this book Rebores has inserted selected readings that are extremely helpful to the reader. In chapter 4 there are selected readings from two of the philosophers (Rousseau and Mills). In selected reading 4.1 there is an excerpt from Rousseau's *Social Contract* in which he establishes the importance of his concepts in relation to the general will and the place of the individual in society. In selected reading 4.2 Rebores inserts an excerpt from Mill's *Utilitarianism*, in this section Mill's sets forth principles of utilitarianism and demonstrates how it is connected to many other theories while also shedding light on how it is grounded in human nature. Perhaps what readers will find most intriguing is Mill's treatise relevance to the ordinary moral framework of everyday life, something we can all relate to.



## About the Author

Ronald W. Rebore is a professor at Saint Louis University located in Saint Louis, Missouri. His professional experience includes 22 years as an administrator: nine years as an assistant superintendent of a medium suburban school district, five years as the superintendent of schools in a small suburban school district, and eight years as the superintendent of schools for a large metropolitan school district employing approximately 4,000 staff members with an annual budget of approximately \$170 million.

He has taught graduate-level courses in educational leadership for approximately 20 years, including ethics courses. Rebore has over 30 publications. Two of his books have been translated into Chinese and have been adopted for use in preparing educational administrators in China.

Rebore has a bachelor of arts degree in philosophy, a master's of education degree in counseling and guidance, and a doctor of philosophy degree in educational leadership.



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